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ABSTRACT

With a view towards finding out whether teachers' practices were consistent with core American values, a field study investigated the interactions of four day care teachers and the children in their charge. Six months of participant observation led to the conceptualization of four features of teachers' schooling action accounting for their relative emphasis on children's individual and social learning experiences: (1) teachers' arrangement of the environment, (2) teacher/child interaction patterns, (3) children's action that teachers allow and/or encourage, (4) and teachers' interactions with each other. Individual learning in social contexts corresponded to the four features of schooling action delineated above. Eight possible reasons for the teachers' schooling action were considered in order to better understand the meaning of the teachers' arrangement of environment and their interactions with children. These reasons included teachers' educational assumptions; pedogogical knowledge and skill; personal history; and personal, maintenance, and management needs. The environment at the center and the children's action were also important. Findings suggested that day care teachers' emphasis on children's individual learning experience perpetuates the traditional American value of individualism. (RH)

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Values, Classroom Interaction, and Social Continuity:

A Field Study of Day Care

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VALUES, CLASSROOM INTERACTION, AND SOCIAL CONTINUITY: A FIELD STUDY OF DAY CARE

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Several months ago I completed a field study of the daily experiences of young children and their teachers in a non-profit day care center, termed Rosehill Child Center. The three key concerns of this field study are values, classroom interaction, and social continuity. From the literature, I have claimed that in America the family always has been the primary vehicle for young children's internalization of society's values and practices (Chodorow, 1978; Freud, 1962; Poster, 1978). In other words, in their everyday child-rearing interactions, parents are significant others in their children's internalization of society's prohibitions and ideals. Thus familial child-rearing interactions insure the continuity of America's values. As children spend 8 to 10 hours each day, five days a week in a day care, day care teachers become significant others in their supplementary childrearing roles. As significant others, their classroom interactions influence the development of young children's values in the same sense that parents are significant others. Day care critics are concerned that this social childrearing within day care will weaken the family and promote collectivist rather than individualistic values, and thereby threaten the social continuity of our nation's values (Greenblatt, 1977; Steinfels, 1973).

Through six months of participant observation, I have examined four day care teachers' interactions as they emphasize children's individual learning experiences and children's social learning experiences. By focusing on the actions and words of day care teachers and their children in their daily activities over time, this field study provides a conceptual model for an initial understanding of whether day care does in fact, threaten the continuity of America's values.

From the observation data, I have conceptualized four features of these teachers' schooling action that are involved in their relative emphasis on children's individual and social learning experiences; first, teachers' arrangement of environment; second, teacher-child interaction patterns; third, children's action that teachers allow and/or encourage; and fourth, teachers' interactions with each other. A structural model of these four features is portrayed in Figure 1. This conceptualization

-insert Figure 1 here-

is one of the major outcomes of the study and provides a way of looking at the schooling acts of teachers at Rosehill, and hopefully, at other day care centers.

Analysis of these four features gives evidence that Rosehill teachers predominantly lean toward an individual learning emphasis, even within varied social situations. First, Rosehill teachers emphasize individual learning in their environmental arrangement, even though the center has ample space, materials and time for teachers to stimulate both individual and social learning experiences. For example, during the six hours of Early and Late Care, teachers choose to have many socially oriented materials and spatial areas closed to the children. When socially oriented materials are available, but adults distant from the area, materials alone do not seem sufficient to enable these children to engage in sustained play sequences involving social interaction.

Second, acknowledging variation both within each teacher's action and variation among the four teachers' action, these teachers' interactions with children predominantly emphasize individual learning experiences, even within social contexts. When teachers are proactive in their interactions with

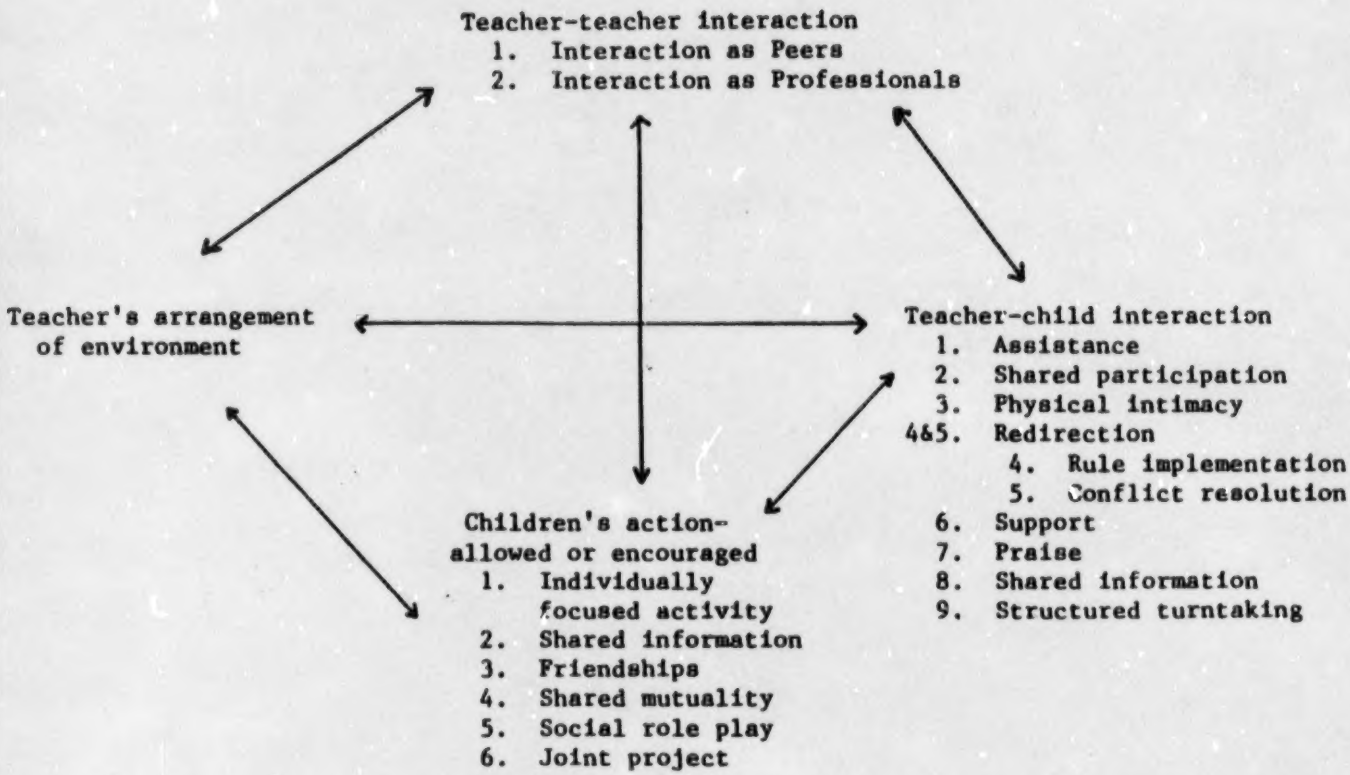

Figure 1

Features of Teachers' Schooling Action Involved in Their Emphasis on Children's Individual and Social Learning Experiences

children, they are either praising or assisting children's individual task mastery or skill in independent functioning. Often the teacher-child interaction is reactive, in response to children's misbehavior. And in their redirection of children's misbehavior, these teachers tend to ignore the context of the children's experience and focus on children learning to function independently through internalization of adult directives. When Rosehill children spontaneously engage in pro-social play sequences, the teachers most frequently are not directly observing these activities and thus are not available to reinforce, extend, guide or emphasize the children's social experiences.

Third, the children's actions that Rosehill teachers allow and/or encourage point to these teachers' orientation toward individual learning. For 8 of the 11 hours at Rosehill, children are engaged in play activities. During these play periods, most children are involved in individually focused activities. Pro-social play sequences that do occur are child initiated, and often teachers are neither participating nor observing.

Fourth, in their interactions with each other, these teachers enjoy companionship with each other as peers; however their peer interactions tend to be separate from their vocational role as team teachers. Rosehill teachers organize their activities as individuals, even when sharing time and space with each other. As a result of their individualistic stance, they miss many opportunities to coordinate their teaching, to give each other feedback, assistance and/or guidance. This failure to work collaboratively as team members inhibits children's individual and social learning opportunities. For example, when teachers fail to coordinate their teaching during transition periods, children do not have the chance to jointly work together with teachers to clean up activities.

An understanding of these teachers' schooling action emerges from extended observations, from teachers' explanations, from teachers' personal histories, and from my personal and professional history as it intersects with the above. Eight reasons for these teachers' schooling action have been suggested: 1) teacher's educational assumptions, 2) teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skill, 3) teachers' personal history, 4) teachers' personal needs, 5)teachers' maintenance needs, 6) teachers' management needs, 7) the given environment at Rosehill, and 8) the children's action. Some of the observed teacher action is intentional. For example, two teachers tell me that Rosehill teachers avoid using the housekeeping and block area "...because they entail so much clean up." Other teacher action is **unintentional.** For example, one teacher conscientiously makes certain that her children have a variety of new materials to use in her room each week. However, given her lack of understanding of children's developmental levels, many of her choices are too difficult for the children, who become frustrated and either compete against each other for her assistance or aimlessly roam about the room. This teacher unwittingly chooses materials that result in recurrent management problems.

In the following I will illustrate how these eight possible reasons for teachers' schooling action assists us in understanding the meaning of these teachers' arrangement of environment and interactions with the children. For linguistic clarity these eight reasons are discussed separately; however the data gives clear evidence that often these eight reasons operate simultaneously and interdependently. For example, Rosehill teachers' use of space and time during the three hour Early Care period meets their personal needs for release time, meets their need to complete maintenance tasks, reflects their assumptions about Early Care as a homelike environment, and allows for ease in group management. In addition to functioning simultaneously, two or more reasons

often are reflexively intertwined. For example, one teacher's redirection of children's misbehavior can be seen as the reflexive intertwining of her educational assumptions, her personal history of Catholicism and Polish experience as a young adult, and her ease in managing newly enrolled young three year olds. The reflexivity of the possible reasons for these teachers' schooling action is represented in the structural model in Figure 2.

- insert Figure 2 here -

Illustrating reasons for teachers' schooling action

1) Teachers' educational assumptions In both interviews and spontaneous conversations with me, teachers explained their understandings of observed happenings at Rosehill. Three teachers, Pam, Barb, and Anne are quick to give their rationale for providing physical intimacy with the children. Both Pam and Barb comments that they see nurturance as one of their most important roles. Barb comments on the children's need for belonging and Pam notes the emotional support children receive through lap sitting and hugging. On the other hand, Anne speaks of showing the children that she loves them through physical intimacy, and in this way, reinforcing their obedience.

> Anne: I think it is important for me to say "I love you", to hug and to kiss, because I am strict. And the children need to know that "she can love too" - that "I'm being good and so I can get a hug for it."

Anne speaks of physical intimacy as one of her ways of achieving control.

2) Pedagogical knowledge and/or skill Of the four teachers in this study, only Pam is skillful in actively participating in spontaneous play activities with children. Further she skillfully guides individual children's participation in group stories and discussions, such that individual contributions add to the flow of the group process. In both of these types of teacher-child shared participation, Pam provides social learning experiences in which children collaborate together and experience perspective taking. The other three teachers do

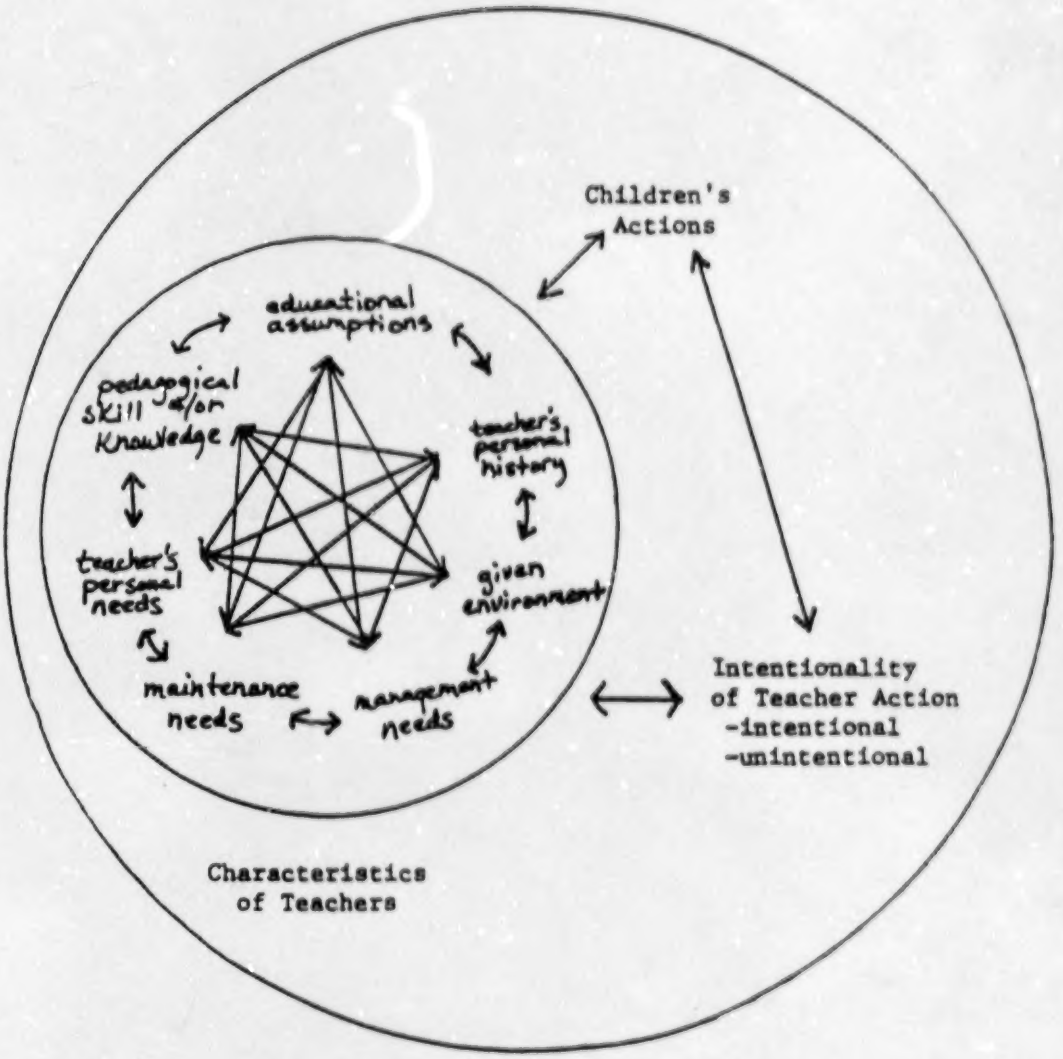

Figure 2

Understanding Teachers'
Schooling Action

not have Pam's skill, and Pam is unable to facilitate the other teachers' growth in these areas. Barb, who is a new teacher at Rosehill, occasionally asks Pam for advice. Pam invariably reassures Barb -- "You're doing fine." -- but does not suggest teaching strategies or invite Barb to observe her own approach.

These teachers primarily are bystanders and not participants in the children's play experiences. When in fact children engage in pro-social interaction, teachers usually are neither involved nor observing. A teacher need not be always totally immersed as full participant to be an effective facilitator; rather s/he can move in and out of the children's involvement to extend, clarify, expand or reinforce the children's play. This moving in and out of children's play is termed facilitative intervention in this field study, and Pam is the only teacher skilled in facilitative intervention. Both early education theory and research emphasize this need for teachers to circulate from individual to individual and from group to group, to enter into the middle of children's action in order to provide continuity and extension of children's learning (Hymes, 1968; Isaacs, 1972, 1974; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1980; Snyder, Snyder, & Snyder, Jr., 1980; Weber, 1971).

3) Teachers' personal history During both formal interviews and informal conversations teachers shared aspects of their personal history. Anne's rule implementation pattern delineates most clearly the intersection of personal history with teacher child interaction. Anne's most frequent interactions with children involve rule implementation, and she sees her main goal as making certain that her children are ready for school. Anne defines readiness in terms of compliance to authority and rule adherence. Frequently Anne speaks to me about her five years teaching in Poland where authoritarian teaching was a given. Her ethnic community within her son's parochial school appears to be congruent with her educational experiences in Poland. Anne frequently confides in me that she sees

most of her day as mere babysitting while the children play. And to the outside observer, Anne seems distracted during most of the day; her relationships with the children primarily are reactive. Anne seems to be role playing at being a teacher, for she seems to be unable to find self fulfillment at Rosehill in the same manner as she had in Poland. Listening to Anne speak of her experiences in Poland and observing her schooling actions over time time in Rosehill illustrates how one's present actions are continuous and interdependent with one's personal history.

4) Teachers' maintenance needs Observations of center happenings and teachers' explanations give evidence that the teachers' rationale for use of time and space is based partially on their needs to complete maintenance tasks. Pam comments that "...Early Care is partially for convenience, for the children come in staggered hours and we need to help with breakfast and do other jobs." And occasionally Pam uses this part of the day for tasks such as putting new name tags on children's cubbies or cleaning an art cabinet.

5) Teachers' management needs These teachers' choice of predominantly individually focused materials during the three hour Early Care period is based partially on ease in teacher management of a large number of very small children. When materials offer multiple ways of use by more than one young child, the likelihood of disputes among children increases. The unit block and housekeeping areas invite spontaneous groupings of children, and these areas most often are closed during Early Care. Pam comments that when the entire Early Care room is open, children race about and "...it is more difficult for us to see what the children are doing." When Barb explains her understanding of the center's first choice policy, that when a child chooses a toy, s/he may decide whether or not s/he wishes to share this toy, Barb states that this rule "...avoids or easily manages the children's fights with each other."

6) Teachers' Personal Needs Rosehill teachers frequently gather together and informally converse with each other during Early Care and outdoor play periods. These teachers are available but not focused on the children. With no official time off periods during their long work day, these teachers seem to use these times to relax and relate to each other as peers. This personal need for release time is similar to these teachers' management decisions based on personal preferences to do what is easiest.

7) The Given Environment at Rosehill Some aspects of Rosehill's physical space are fixed components of the center, and thus limit teachers' choices. Rosehill operates within a church that does not have enough space for individual classroom for all teachers and children. Thus the large church meeting room serves multiple uses for several teachers and a large number of young children -- for eating, napping, Early and Late Care, Activity Period and Group Time. This fact, that each teacher must share a large space with other teachers and many children, sets limits on teachers' choices of environmental arrangement.

8) Children's Action When teachers are focused on young children's involvement, they often can extend or enrich this involvement by adding or changing materials, rearranging furniture, or changing the schedule of activity segments. Because Rosehill teachers often are not directly focused on the children's activity, they frequently miss opportunities to enrich or extend the children's involvement. Nevertheless, several sequences when children's actions are the basis for teacher choice of environmental arrangement were observed. When children developed an elaborate zoo and began to role play in the block area, Pam extended the length of Activity Period so that the children

could continue playing. Similarly, if the children seemed exceedingly restless during Early Care, Pam occasionally shortened Early Care and began the next activity earlier than usual.

This discussion of eight possible reasons for Rosehill teachers' schooling action has focused on the internal events within the center and the teachers' explanations of those events. Having examined what constitutes children's individual and social learning experiences in one day care setting, this study then examines at a broader level, how the study's findings are reflective of arrangements within the larger society. As developed from the literature (deTocqueville, 1839; Dewey, 1929; Lasch, 1979; Lipset, 1967; Lukes, 1973; Wood, 1972), America's dominant value tradition of individualism is depicted in order to ask whether Rosehill children's experiences are congruent with this value value orientation of our society.

When examining America's tradition of individualism from an historical perspective, we see that this tradition encompasses a complex dynamic of behavior, belief, attitudes and values, which are often taken for granted aspects of American everyday life and which have been manifest in multiple ways over the past 250 years. We have labeled as the psychological dimension that theme of individualism which encompasses the hard work, self determination and self reliance of the 17th century settlers, the self improvement ethic embodied in Franklin's writings of the 18th century, the social reform of the individual ethic emerging in the 19th century, and the 20th century ethic of self actualization and search for personal meaning.

Findings from this participant observation study indicate how within a social context, Rosehill teachers emphasis on children's individual learning experiences perpetuates this value tradition. For example the preponderance of individually focused activity choices, in which children "do what they want

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in their own way", reinforces an orientation toward independence and self reliance. Individual achievement and self improvement are emphasized as teachers predominantly focus on assisting children in mastery of self care habits and success in individual task completion, actions teachers frequently praise. Self actualization is celebrated through the children's many art activities, which hang from the ceilings and walls throughout the center.

But just as the complexities of American individualism encompasses social reform movements and egalitarianism, so too a pluralism in Rosehill teachers' action can be seen intheir alternative, albeit less frequent orientation toward children's social experiences. For example, children experience shared enjoyment in group singing and story reading. Throughout most of the day Rosehill children engage in many spontaneous conversations with each other and adults, and in these informal exchanges experience a sense of companionship and belonging. While acknowledging this orientation toward the social as well as the individual, we have seen that Rosehill teachers' actions lean toward an emphasis on children's individual learning experiences. At Rosehill, as independence takes prece dence over interdependence, self responsibility over social responsibility, individual achievement over group collaboration, these teachers promote values congruent with our society's dominant tradition of individualism.

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